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THE TRANSLATION OF BEOWULF.

ONE of the most marked characteristics of the modern translation of *Beowulf* is the tendency to retain as many distinctive Anglo-Saxon peculiarities as possible—a tendency that frequently results in perplexing the general reader, to whom translations are ordinarily of value and assistance. In securing consideration, the assertion in defense of this method that it alone furnishes an adequate impression of the poetry with which it is concerned, recalls at once the different metrical principles of Anglo-Saxon and modern English. As stated by Schipper, the essential matter for all alliterative poetry was the number of stresses alone, the number of unstressed syllables being indifferent; whereas in modern English the essential matter is not only the number of stressed syllables, but also the number of syllables unstressed and their position relative to those stressed. To be sure, since the arsis may in Anglo-Saxon either precede or follow the thesis, and since the number of unstressed syllables in the thesis is variable, certain individual measures of Anglo-Saxon may correspond with some feet of modern English verse, provided the number of unstressed syllables does not exceed two. But the correspondence is at best only a superficial and accidental one. The movement of the verse as a whole does not resemble ours; because, although there is a certain order in the grouping of measures, which justifies a classification of them by types, yet this regularity of arrangement holds only for the half line, the metrical unit, and there is no consistent employment of any one kind of measure throughout an entire line. Two of these half lines, whose distinction is rigidly maintained by the cesura, are loosely joined into a sort of complete rhythmical system by alliteration.

These peculiarities—the irregular disposition of the unaccented syllables, and the retention of alliteration and of the cesura—are the Anglo-Saxon characteristics, whose representation is attempted in English in violation, it seems to me, of certain obvious principles of translation. For, in the first place, a translation from one language into another should conform to the genius of the latter language.

This is merely the deduction of its meaning from the term itself; and I should have supposed that no one, in spite of occasional lapses of bad practice, would contradict the statement when made of such elementary, but at the same time fundamental, matters as those of word order, sentence-structure, and diction; in other words, would deny that whatever is written in a language should follow its common custom. And it is certain that no translation, say from the German, which should retain the original arrangement of the sentences, or smack of foreign idioms, or restore their primitive Teutonic meanings to English words, such as the general sense of tilled land to acre, would be tolerated for a moment.

But not only in these rudimentary matters should a translation conform to the language in which it is written, but, if a poetic rendering is attempted, in point of versification also. However, since Modern English, as has been seen, possesses no metre corresponding to the Anglo-Saxon, since in fact its metrical principle is entirely different, the sort of translators with whom at present we have to do, are obliged either to adapt a native measure roughly to follow the general movement of the original, or to revive the older metre. The latter practice has been strongly advocated by Dr. Gummere,¹ who goes a little farther, I fancy, than most scholars will be quite ready to accompany him. The distinctive feature of his specimen translation is its freedom in inserting or omitting unaccented syllables following the Anglo-Saxon lines—a procedure distinctly un-English.

Professor Garnett's version is practically of the same kind in its indiscriminate use of iambs and trochees, anapaests and dactyls, in its insistence upon "the preservation of the two accents being the main point," and in its "use of all the usual licenses in early English verse."² In spite of its many merits as a literal and line-for-line translation, it is on the preceding account open to the same criticism as Dr. Gummere's—of being un-English, a dis-

¹ F. B. Gummere; "The Translation of *Beowulf*, and the Relation of Ancient and Modern English Verse," *American Journal of Philology*, vii.

² *Beowulf; An Anglo-Saxon Poem and the Fight at Finnsburg*, translated by James M. Garnett, p. xii.

advantage of which Prof. Garnett is himself aware.³

The former alternative of translation, that is, the adaption of a native measure roughly to follow the general movement of the original, which is practically the method of Ettmüller and Grein in German, may be illustrated in English by a reference to any of Mr. Stopford A. Brooke's quotations from *Beowulf* in his *History of Early English Literature*. His system differs from that of Prof. Garnett in the disposition of the accents, the stressed syllables in the former always occupying the same position relative to the syllables unstressed. It agrees with the versions of Prof. Garnett and Dr. Gummere, in the occasional insertion of an additional unaccented syllable, although it allows itself less freedom in this respect than do the others.

As a literary product, Dr. Hall's translation is superior to any others of this sort from the fact that he has succeeded in following the original very closely with a movement and measure not altogether unnatural to Modern English verse, and without resorting to violent distortions of the language.

Whether the translator prefers the adaption of a native measure roughly to follow the general movement of the original, or the revival of the older metre, the result of neither expedient is English, and it ought to be condemnation enough that it impresses us at once as strange, uncouth, and outlandish.

The introduction of alliteration is less objectionable because its use has survived to some extent in Modern English, and its mere presence is therefore not anomalous. But there is a reasonable objection against its systematic employment. Its only legitimate office in our poetry is as an occasional ornament. Its frequent application is a vice, and its frequent occurrence is offensive. Even the skill of Mr. Swinburne is unable to make its excess barely more than tolerable. When a constant factor of verse, it is liable to all the criticism that can be made of other transgressions of linguistic law and custom. This fact Dr. Hall has recognized, stating as a principle of his translation that "alliteration has been used to a large extent, but it was thought that

modern ears would hardly tolerate it in every line."⁴ Prof. Garnett seems to avoid constant alliteration merely as a matter of convenience, not seeking it, but employing it "purposely whenever it readily presents itself."⁵

Now these violations of what I may be permitted to call the first principle of translation are committed with the hope of aiding persons ignorant of Anglo-Saxon to gain an idea of that language as applied to poetry. But the hope, besides presenting an unsuitable object of ambition, is vain. The endeavor to convey a notion of one speech through the medium of another must from its very nature fail. It leads only to a distortion of the one and a misrepresentation of the other, all the more misleading because of its profession of correctness. There is but one way of obtaining an adequate conception of a foreign language—to learn it; and nothing can supply the deficiency of this knowledge. The inadequacy of even the best translation, judged by this standard, is too well recognized to be insisted upon. Nor is the case altered, as has been already said, by the fact that the English of say the eighth century and the English of the nineteenth, is linguistically one language. It is one that has suffered in the interim a revolution sufficient to estrange the two extremes. Its vocabulary has been changed, its inflectional system has been subverted, and its entire structure has been modified. It has assumed in many cases new characteristics, notably in substituting the Romance method of verse for the Teutonic. Therefore the attempt to express one extreme in terms of the other results in abuses and perversions of speech, in the confusion and perplexity of the general reader, in whose interest it is made, and in consequent failure.

Moreover the attempt becomes not only improper through its nonconformity to the prescriptions of language, and idle through the impossibility of success, but also actually deceptive through its neglect of the real duty of translation. For the translator, while rejecting those merely formal peculiarities of his original that are contrary to present and native usage, should show himself exceedingly jealous for the preservation of its poetic char-

⁴ *Ibid*, p. viii.

⁵ Garnett's *Translation*, p. xii.

³ *Ibid*. pp. x xiii, xv, xvi.

acter and its spiritual temper. And in this respect the versions with which we have so far been concerned, are not alone faulty. Many of those whose form is blameless, whose use of the English language and of English metres is irreproachable, fail, nevertheless, to render their author's distinctive qualities. For example, a dignity devoid of self-consciousness, and a deliberation unruffled by the natural rapidity of the Anglo-Saxon measures, are two characteristics of *Beowulf*, whose omission is sufficient to vitiate any translation of that poem. But can a language full of inversions, a vocabulary crammed with barbarisms, and a metre conspicuous for its oddity, reasonably be expected to reproduce this naïve dignity? Or can the sprightly movement of the ballad, skipping inconsequently from one scene to another, pretend to render the inherent deliberation, which is always retarding the action of *Beowulf*, and at times quite arrests it?

It is on the latter account that Col. Lumsden's translation leaves much to be desired. His remark, however, on the closer metrical rendering, deserves attention as the opinion of a man of letters, thoroughly conversant with the subject and unembarrassed by the prepossessions which, in this matter, are so liable to mislead the purely technical students:

"The alliterated rhythmical lines of Anglo-Saxon poetry," he says, "are, perhaps, more artificial than any modern form of English verse, and an attempt to reproduce them, unless done with the consummate skill which Mr. Tennyson has shown in the translation of the *Song of Brunanburh*, would soon leave the ear at once wearied and unsatisfied."⁶

While some exception might be taken to his statement concerning the artificiality of Anglo-Saxon verse as compared with modern English, and his judgment of Tennyson's experiment, yet the experience of the general reader confirms his conclusion.

Wackerbarth's translation of *Beowulf*, written in Scott's favorite metre, is still further from recalling a trace of the dignity or deliberation of the original.

Now, in addition to affording a basis for

negative and destructive criticism, this second principle, that the translator should be exceedingly jealous for the preservation of the poetic character and the spiritual temper of his original, seems to involve a corollary, which although true only in an approximate and qualified way, holds out a hope of something positive and constructive, and which may be stated as follows. The translation and the original should produce, each upon those to whom it directly addresses itself, essentially the same impression and this coincidence of impression, if applied fairly and discreetly, will be found a very just test of the value of a translation. For example, one who is capable of reading *Beowulf* intelligently and discerningly, is impressed by certain qualities, among others the two of simple dignity and unruffled deliberation already spoken of; and such an one, to form a correct estimate of any version, has only to ask himself whether a person capable of reading it with equal intelligence and discernment is impressed by it in a like way. But this criterion must be used with some caution; for every one is not competent, singly and of himself, to form correct notions of both the original and the translation. Yet with a knowledge of the two languages involved and with some feeling for style, we may apply this test safely and satisfactorily to decide the pretensions of a translation.

And when we have acquired some facility in its exercise, we shall probably become dissatisfied with the mere detection of faults, though relieved by occasional virtues, and proceed to ask ourselves what modern metre is best fitted to render *Beowulf*. And the question will take some such shape as this. What form of modern English verse impresses us in our character of English readers most nearly as the poetry of *Beowulf* itself impresses us in our character of Anglo-Saxon readers? And in spite of the confusion which naturally invests every thing connected with such a subject, it does not seem doubtful that the answer to this question as so proposed is blank verse, and that for several reasons. In the first place, blank verse is our natural epic expression. It is the form of verse that affects us most heroically. It is inseparably connected in our minds and hearts with the sort of poetry that

⁶ *Beowulf: Translation into Modern Rhymes*, by Lieut. Col. H. M. Lumsden; p. xxv.

Beowulf actually is in Anglo-Saxon, and should be made to appear in English. It alone has the traditions and associations necessary to give the right suggestion. Again, the blank verse line is the line most susceptible of the constant variation indispensable in translating *Beowulf*. On account of the freedom with which it allows the frequent substitution of other feet for the normal iambic one, it lends itself with remarkable readiness to a variety of movements, which indeed will not repeat the original ones, but will indicate them to our poetic sensibilities. It is necessary to read Shakespeare only slightly to realize what the pliability of the verse actually is.

It is sometimes objected against the fitness of blank verse that its majestic pace represents very imperfectly the quickness and lightness of Anglo-Saxon poetry. And this is true. The deliberation of *Beowulf*, of which I have spoken, does not lie in the metre, which is rapid, easy, and fluent. It is rather an indecision or irresolution in the progress of the action, amounting at times to paralysis. And while the action so delays and halts, the measures run along quick and crisp, in a way that blank verse is quite unable to follow. Yet it is not essential that it should do so, for we have seen that the exact transcription of the Anglo-Saxon measures and the exact reproduction of the rhythmical movement, is impossible, not to say undesirable in English, and that we can require only a general similarity of impression.

Therefore, in spite of its inability to follow the movement of Old English poetry, blank verse would seem theoretically—and that notwithstanding Conybeare's failures—to be the best medium for rendering *Beowulf*, because it is the only measure which combines with adaptability a heroic suggestion sufficiently strong to convey to us the impression which that poem made upon its audience, and still makes upon those capable of reading it understandingly—the impression of an epic. But even while this statement may seem theoretically true, a thoroughly practical test is alone able satisfactorily to decide the question.

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THE WALPURGISNACHT IN THE CHRONOLOGY OF GOETHE'S

Faust.

GOETHE'S Walpurgisnacht scene, found neither in the *Urfaust* nor in the *Fragment* of 1790, made its first appearance in the completed *First Part* of 1808. A brief examination of of these different recensions of the drama may make clear the purpose for which the scene was inserted.

The hero of the *Urfaust*, seeking freedom from restraint, displays few of the higher qualities of mankind. About Mephistopheles, his friend, there is but little of the supernatural.

A part of the original plan was, perhaps, to have Valentin, who occurs in the *Urfaust* only in speaking the monolog II. 1373-1397, attack Gretchen's seducer and be killed by him. Faust would then flee to avoid arrest, and Gretchen, drowning her child upon its birth, would wander a vagrant until apprehended, imprisoned, and condemned to death. This, however, would make it necessary to explain how Faust, possessing any love or conscience, could so long remain away from Gretchen after having caused not only her fall, but the death of her mother and brother. Of this problem the *Urfaust* attempts no solution.

Between the dates of the *Urfaust* and the publication of the *Fragment* of 1790, Goethe's period of Sturm und Drang subsiding, had been replaced by different ideas of form in art and life, new ideals of love and poetry, and new feeling for nature. On March 1st, 1788—so says the *Italienische Reise* (1786-1788)—Goethe made a plan for Faust and was working out a new scene. This, the 'Hexenküche' as we know from Eckermann (April 10, 1829), was introduced to change the learned old professor to the passionate young lover, and to remove from Faust some of the responsibility for the ruin of Gretchen.

Compared with the *Urfaust*, the *Fragment* of 1790 has both omitted old and added new matter. The additions consist of 'Hexenküche' and 'Wald und Höhle,' the latter introduced, apparently, with the idea of making Faust less a heartless libertine by causing him, oppressed by a feeling of guilt, to retire to the